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The gas boom: Be smart about what you see, hear

Towanda Daily Review, Editorial

Published: November 19, 2010

- ***"If you want a relatively quick overview of the natural gas phenomenon, watch the 60 Minutes program. And by way of contrast, see "Gasland" and learn for yourself the difference between a responsible report and a hatchet job."***
- ***"The gas industry has brought about an economic boom that likely will continue to be a transformational force in this region. In a word, it's called progress. As the effects of the phenomenon spread, our lives, for the most part, are improved. The future looks brighter."***

Bradford County and the surrounding region once again are being exposed to the glare of national publicity. The current version deals with the natural gas boom in the Marcellus Shale.

Two recent events are notable: The showing of the controversial documentary "Gasland" at the Keystone Theatre in Towanda earlier this month, and the airing Sunday night of CBS' "60 minutes" segment of the pros and cons of the current gas boom. Both looked at drilling nationwide and both also zeroed in on the water contamination problems in Dimock, the small community in nearby Susquehanna County.

"Gasland," aired some time back on HBO, drew quite a crowd at the Keystone, just about filling the downstairs portion of the main theater - about 250 people in all.

As most know by now, the film is critical of the gas drilling industry. Dimock is a microcosm for filmmaker Josh Fox, a Pennsylvania native. The state Department of Environmental Protection declared that Cabot Oil and Gas was responsible for polluting the domestic water supplies for a dozen or more households in Dimock. Cabot, while disputing the DEP, is providing the property owners with fresh water supplies.

The two presentations are notable for vastly different reasons. One show, "Gasland," was a long, muck-raking polemic, peppered with sensationalism, emotionalism, and distortions. The other was a much shorter, balanced and informative news report that recognized the economic value of the

gas boom while responsibly acknowledging there are risks and problems.

"Gasland," despite its shortcomings, is an artistic achievement. It is a well-paced, absorbing film. Too bad the science, the facts, are presented so manipulatively. Such an effort serves only to rile people based on misleading information and makes gathering support for any needed corrective action more difficult.

And, amazingly, here's the bottom line, in Josh Fox' own words during a PBS interview: Referring to Dimock in highly exaggerated terms, such as a "disaster area" with a "total loss of normal life," he then conceded, "Who knows if they (residents) are right. I don't. It's all speculation."

Speculation, indeed, to the superlative degree in this film.

By contrast, the "60 Minutes" presentation features Aubrey McClendon, the CEO, chairman and cofounder of Chesapeake Energy, the most active driller of new wells in the nation, and the largest leaseholder of gas-drilling rights in Bradford County. McClendon, named by Forbes Magazine as one of America's top-performing executives, is an articulate, convincing advocate for the natural gas industry.

The program contrasts the opposition to gas drilling embodied by Dimock with the excitement about gas drilling found in communities built above the Haynesville Shale in the Northwest corner of Louisiana. There, newfound "Shaleionaires" celebrate the economic vitality the industry has created in their communities.

If you want a relatively quick overview of the natural gas phenomenon, watch the 60 Minutes program. And by way of contrast, see "Gasland" and learn for yourself the difference between a responsible report and a hatchet job.

And, to underscore that "60 minutes" does not have a monopoly on responsible video presentations about this controversial topic, consider another documentary called "Haynesville," by filmmaker Gregory Kallenberg.

The "60 Minutes" program can be found [here](#).

Much about the two documentaries can be found by researching the titles in the Web.

As we said on this page recently, the gas industry has brought about an economic boom that likely will continue to be a transformational force in this region.

In a word, it's called progress. As the effects of the phenomenon spread, our lives, for the most part, are improved. The future looks brighter. Don't take someone else's word for it. Evaluate the pros and cons. Figure it out for yourselves.

In the final analysis, embrace the change, take control, ensure proper regulation and the means to pay for it, and see to it that if anyone is harmed, they are made whole. But, most of all, celebrate the new opportunities, promote orderly growth, and reap the rewards.

NOTE: Click [HERE](#) to view this editorial online and [HERE](#) to view the document "*Debunking GasLand*."

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